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AUTHOR Lally, J. Ronald; And Others
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ABSTRACT

This report describes the use and training of paraprofessionals at the Syracuse University Children's Center. The Center's primary task is supplying supportive services to low-income families and provides, as part of their day care experiences for the children and their families, staff from various backgrounds and situations so that the children are exposed to many different life styles, personalities, and cultures. Portions of this report on paraprofessionals are devoted to their selection and the method of selection, and training, including prerequisite decisions, availability of materials, training techniques, what the trainers should be alert for, training areas, preservice and inservice training areas, and training spinoffs for people and programs. (JS)

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TRAINING PARAPROFESSIONALS FOR WORK WITH INFANTS AND TODDLERS

J. Ronald Lally[1] and Alice S. Honig

Syracuse University

and

Bettye M. Caldwell

University of Arkansas

We are often asked to describe how child care workers should be trained. And during the last few years we have received urgent requests from people hoping to train paraprofessionals. Response to these requests is most often made with ambivalence because the dissemination of a training process is a most difficult endeavor. Often the content, the materials, and even the fundamental theory can be communicated; but the style, the flavor, and the emotional tone will evade description or be distorted by the needs of the people using the information.

It is not enough to write about methods, materials, and strategies with the hopes that these will generalize to other people and programs. Of critical importance to success in training are the preconceptions of the program director and trainers toward the people they select. If, for instance, the director and trainers believe that they are selecting the best people for a job, the chances for a successful training program will increase. However, if they are selecting trainees because they are cheaper, because they want to keep peace in the inner city, or because they have a local guideline with which they would like to comply, then no matter how they use the materials and ideas available to them, they will probably fail. The trainer should feel that the paraprofessionals are coming into the program with background and skills which might be different from but not less than the background and skills of the professionals. If a commitment to

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respect for the attributes a paraprofessional brings with her to training is not present, then the materials that we will share with you and the methods that we will be recommending may not help you to have successful training programs.

Just as operating programs differ in many ways, training must differ from place to place. At the Syracuse University Children's Center, where our primary task is supplying supportive services to low-income families, we try to provide, as part of our day care experience for the children and their families, staff from various backgrounds and situations--men and women, young people and old people, rich people and poor people, fat people and skinny people, black, or brown, or white people, students and professors, formally educated and practically educated people. We try to provide these people so that the children can experience many different life styles, personalities, and cultures. The paraprofessional fits into this type of community of persons easily, for her abilities and styles are valued, as are the particular abilities and styles of all the other groups. At the Children's Center we look to the paraprofessionals to help enlighten other members of the staff so that all may be able to do a better job. A program with different goals and staffing arrangements will need a training program that reflects these differences.

Paraprofessionals are no longer a new phenomenon, and a great deal has been written about them (see Horton, 1971; Lally, 1969; Levenstein, 1971; Naylor & Bittner, 1967). Bowman and Klopf (1968), in their book, "New Careers and Roles in the American School," have concisely presented a history of the paraprofessional movement in the United States. They show that in the mid-sixties the employment of auxiliary personnel in schools and in other human services rose sharply, corresponding to the availability of federal funds on a massive scale for such purposes.

They point out that in the 1950's, the work of the National Youth Administration did not produce lasting and satisfying results, and that the emphasis placed on budgetary considerations by the earlier use of paraprofessionals hindered many programs. It was further explained that the paraprofessional movement of the mid-sixties differed from earlier ones because it was based on the rationale that all persons in our country had a right to essential human services. As this rationale became accepted and coupled with the increased awareness of the paucity of existing resources, the paraprofessional became more attractive. The movement of paraprofessionals into the area of human services, coupled with the career ladder concept of upward mobility for those who seek it, was cited as a major innovation of the sixties. Another critical innovation cited by Bowman and Klopf was the utilization of auxiliary personnel, usually low-income workers, as participants in the process of problem-solving, rather than recipients of the wisdom of those far removed from the realities of poverty.

Selection of Paraprofessionals

In the training of paraprofessionals, the selection of appropriate people for training is one of the keys to success. It is up to the program director or trainer to decide what the reasons are for selecting a person for training. If, for instance, the training of mothers who have children in the center is one program goal, the selection process will be different from the process used if the goal is to find the best person available for the job. It is likely that while some persons might be chosen because they lack certain skills, but can learn them, others might be selected because they are already qualified for the position; still others might be given a job no matter what their skills. In any event, program policy-makers and administrators should have a clear idea of their

selection priorities in advance of hiring. The selection of staff will have a major impact on training decisions and on the pace at which people will be able to advance in jobs. Parker and Dittmann (1971) have reminded us that, "By and large, the educational system up to now has failed to teach the minority child about his cultural identity. It is therefore recommended that priority be given to the employment of staff from the same ethnic group being served." Parker and Dittmann go on to suggest that within that ethnic group priority should be given to males and parents in all selection procedures. We know of no data available at present to warrant preferential treatment of males over females in the selection of persons to fill paraprofessional positions. It is common knowledge, however, that most child care centers serving infants and toddlers use many more women than men as caregivers. Therefore, active recruitment of males is encouraged to assure that male caregivers will be available to the children.

Another important question which often comes in selection procedures is whether paraprofessionals should themselves be parents of children who are enrolled in the program. Since 1965 this has been something of an official Head Start policy, and the same practice is followed in most of the existing parent-child centers. Klopf, Bowman, and Joy (1969), in their book concerned with the use of paraprofessionals in the school system, recommend the use of parents as aides in the classroom. Many program directors and teachers find that this sometimes creates problems. Yet, in view of our intent of involving parents in the development of their children as much as possible, it would appear to be an important selection criterion to be kept in mind.

Methods of selection. The methods of selecting paraprofessionals vary from program to program. Herbert Sprigle (1970) in his "Learning to Learn" school in Jacksonville, Florida, brings potential teachers into a classroom with a few

children and tells the candidate, "Do your thing." Then, on the basis of clinical observations, he selects the people who appear to be most appropriate for the job. William Frankenberg (Parker and Dittmann, 1971) has a very sophisticated screening battery for selecting paraprofessionals which includes such measures as the gauging of reactions to video-tapes, problem-solving tasks, and paper-and-pencil tests. Many Head Start programs and some Parent-Child Centers use observation of volunteers as a way of selecting prospective employees. Because of the number of volunteers involved in these programs, directors are able to observe the volunteers' ability with the children and hire those who appear to have the potential for the most success.

Others, the Syracuse University Children's Center among them, use an interview system of open-ended questioning and role-playing in choosing paraprofessionals. These open-ended questioning and role-playing approaches help determine an individual's behavior sets and teaching styles. Katz (1970) makes a distinction between role and style. She has identified the duties, responsibilities, and functions expected of the teacher by her clients and herself as "roles." "Style" she designates as that aspect of the teacher's behavior that might be called the individual qualities with which the teacher's role is performed. Beller (1971) makes a similar distinction between style and technique:

Technique of caregiving refers to the strategies and methods employed by the caregiver or teacher to carry out her role or to accomplish her objective. For example, a caregiver may use varying amounts of reward or punishment, praise or criticism to socialize a child. A teacher may instruct a whole group of children or individual children; she may provide factual information or create opportunities for the child to discover such information on his own. Even with regard

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to the latter, she may use questioning, suggestions, or active direction as her preferred technique for achieving the goal of developing a greater fund of knowledge in the child.

Style refers to personality traits and attitudes of the caregiver or teacher which are not a planned component of the role. Any reaction or attitude which becomes a planned component of role functioning is a technique and not a style element. Thus, characteristics such as friendly or unfriendly, warm or cold, intimate or detached, sensitive or insensitive, relaxed or tense, or strict or permissive are style variables only if they are unplanned characteristics of role functioning. As we shall see, such characteristics have important consequences on the success or failure of a caregiver's or teacher's role (pp. 252-253).

In the Center's selection process we try to uncover information about the candidate's styles that might be resistant to change. The candidate's ideas about corporal punishment and her feelings concerning early social game-playing with very young children are discussed. Assessments are made about the candidate's genuine pleasure in watching children grow and learn and her style of communication along the continuum of interactive-verbal ⟷ isolate-silent. Additionally we try to explore the candidate's feeling for the balance between dependence and independence in young children; that is, how does the candidate view the changing needs of a child for support and freedom.

In order to discover this information, questions such as the following are asked: "How should a one-year-old baby act; and how do you get him to act that way?" and "How do you spoil a child and what do you do to keep from spoiling a child?" An effective role-playing situation involves putting the interviewee in a position of having to recruit the interviewer into the program by asking her,

"Tell me the good things we will be doing with young infants and toddlers so that you will convince me to join this program." Similarly, the prospective paraprofessional may be asked to take the role of project director and answer the question, "If you had all the money and the opportunity to do whatever you wanted to do here, what would you do?"

In these situations one can ascertain not only the verbal skills of the applicant, but also many of her ideas about such issues as child-rearing, discipline, and the nature of intelligence. We emphasize that careful consideration should be given to making sure that selection of each candidate is based on an estimate of potential to handle the training situation and to grow with it, rather than on already existing competencies.

You must remember that everyone in the child care facility has contact with children and therefore should have some basic skills and attitudes that enable him to relate to children successfully. A good deal of emphasis needs to be placed on identifying potentially skilled child care workers by looking at the number of people who provide supportive services in a Center--for example, the food service worker, the driver, the rider, the custodial worker--and then including in their job definition both a child care responsibility and adequate training to support them in this somewhat new role. These people may eventually move to full-time child care responsibilities or their roles be so broadly defined that they contribute in many different ways to program success.

Training of Paraprofessionals

Decisions prerequisite to training. Before the actual training can be started, certain decisions should be made with respect to the organization of the training

groups and the duration of the training period. Will, for instance, professionals and paraprofessionals be trained together? Is there to be a hierarchically organized classroom structure with a master teacher, teacher, teacher aide, etc. down the career development ladder; or is there to be a cooperative classroom structure where each person in the classroom is given the title of teacher, with similar responsibilities, and where salaries are based on evidence of competence? Also of importance are decisions concerning pre-service and in-service training, such as the structure and the duration of each segment and the ratio of pre-service to in-service training.

Availability of materials. Increasingly more materials are becoming available for use in training paraprofessionals for their work with infants and toddlers. These materials include both content, or "what to teach" materials, as well as materials describing methods for training paraprofessionals. A list of such materials is included in an extended reference section at the end of this paper.

Techniques of training. Lectures and large group discussions about abstract ideas may be ineffective approaches to the training of paraprofessionals. When these methods must be used they should be liberally laced with questions designed to stimulate the trainees to clarify their ideas by way of their own experiences or active involvement in the training topic. For example, the Socratic technique used during lectures on language development may include asking trainees, "What kinds of ways besides the use of words can babies let us know what they want or need?" or "What could a baby be doing that would make you decide it was a good time to teach him the word 'cookie'?"

Direct, supervised, work experiences with mothers, children, and materials are effective training devices. Role playing, with trainees interacting with each other in the roles of caregiver, infant, and parent may heighten trainee awareness of the subtle problems he or she will face in the job. The use of effective words and gestures necessary for communication with parents, infants, and other caregivers, is often learned through role playing.

When an abstract idea is discussed, it should be presented as a small learning capsule complete with concrete examples, small group discussions for clarifications, and over-training in areas where understanding is deemed essential. As the training session progresses, there should be time for small groups to air and discuss problems, complaints, suggestions, and changes. For example, in an object permanence lesson, paraprofessionals may be learning how to hide toys under cloths, pillows or cups so that babies get a chance to search for hidden objects. The trainees should be asked to think up other sorts of games that help a baby enjoy learning to seek out and search for a hidden object. Trainees may suggest "Peek-a-boo" as a fine object permanence game. They may suggest bringing toys slowly or more rapidly around and in back of their own or a baby's body as caregiver and infant sit together on a rug. The trainer should be sure to ask the paraprofessionals how to simplify the game for a baby for whom it is too difficult. The trainees should also think up ways to challenge the baby with a more difficult variant of the task that is too easy. Paraprofessionals may need help at first in understanding the concept of levels of difficulty of a task. A task which involves invisible displacement, for instance, where a toy is first hidden in a fist or cup before being slipped under a cover, is more difficult than a visible displacement task, where a toy is hidden directly under a cloth as the baby watches.

Paraprofessionals must be convinced of the importance of baby watching. The caregiver who watches her babies' responses can plan better. She can use these responses as clues for modifying learning games to keep them interesting, enjoyable, and better suited to the babies' abilities.

What trainers must be alert for. During the training process one must not be seduced into thinking things are going better than they really are. One trainee behavior that a trainer must watch out for is what we call the disbelief-indulgence syndrome. Often a paraprofessional may not believe or agree with what the trainer says about a subject, but knowing how committed the trainer is to his or her own ideas, and not wanting to hurt the trainers' feelings, the paraprofessional may indulge the trainer. She does this by letting the trainer think that their beliefs are similar. The topics of discipline and the importance of early vocal interaction of adults and children are two areas where this disbelief-indulgence syndrome frequently arise. Perhaps the best method for exploring these feelings is in concrete situations in which the trainee is producing interactions with children and she is relying more on her own habit systems for guidance than on recently learned skills.

A warning is also needed against using too much technical jargon in the training program, because of the "pseudo-understanding" which often results. Heads which nod in response to words such as "cognitive, "sensorimotor" and "schema," do not necessarily indicate genuine understanding of these difficult concepts. Trainers need to be sure that they are not fooling themselves into thinking that in-depth understanding can be gained easily. "Pseudo-understanding" happens also when complex ideas such as evolution, testing of hypotheses, control comparisons, and the effects of heredity or environment are explained in simple terms. Many concepts

are difficult to understand, even though the words used to explain them might have only a few letters in them. An episode that occurred recently in an in-service training session conducted by one of the authors provides a good illustration of this. The paraprofessionals participate in a year-long course in basic child development, using films and film strips, discussions, observational assignments, and the like. On the particular day in question the subject was heredity and prenatal development--a difficult subject to present in a simplified manner. "Marking" was used as an example of a common misunderstanding of placental attachment and the mechanism through which infants are protected from direct outside experience. One woman, who had been smiling and shaking her head affirmatively through much of the discussion, eagerly raised her hand and related excitedly, "My baby was marked." Her tone was such that one had the impression she thought she was corroborating, not contradicting, what the instructor had said. She then launched into a long discussion of the occasion (being frightened at a carnival) and the nature of the mark (a ferris wheel). Needless to say, the instructor was nonplussed and could only mumble what is undoubtedly the truth--that we do not have all the answers in the area of prenatal development, but that probably such dramatic instances of marking would be found very rarely!

Areas of Training

There are a number of topical areas that we feel must be covered in a comprehensive training program. Although we have made a distinction between pre-service and in-service training components, this distinction refers only to the way content should be handled and not to the content itself. That is, all topics need to be touched upon in pre-service sessions and reinforced during in-service training sessions.

Pre-service areas of training. During the pre-service period of training some of the important topics which should be stressed include:

1. Brief surveys of infant and child development with focus on motoric, sensory, perceptual, affective, language, cognitive, and familial variables.
2. A simplified description of Piaget's six sensori-motor stages, and his preoperational period.
3. A description of Erikson's concepts of trust vs. mistrust, autonomy vs. shame or doubt, and initiative vs. guilt.
4. Information about nutrition, health care, and safety routines.
5. Information on the ecology of the classroom, including the use of space and time, such as areas and times for activities and how the classroom environment (walls, windows, chairs, etc.) may be used for developmental tasks.
6. A description of tasks, games, or situations appropriate for eliciting and reinforcing language, cognitive, and sensori-motor functions.
7. An explanation of the ways in which many of these tasks can be fitted into the greater part of daily routines, such as diapering, dressing, and feeding times.
8. Stressing the problem of the match by setting up sample lessons to the trainee such as: "What comes next?" "What should come before you do a cognitive task?" "What should you try if an infant succeeds immediately at a task?" "What should you do if an infant fails on a task?"
9. Sharpening observation skills by means of comments and questions following demonstrations with infants.

10. Presentation and creation of materials. In presenting materials, stress their potentialities and how they promote sensory experiences such as seeing, touching, body-motion, feeling, hearing, tasting, and smelling. Have the paraprofessionals create such materials as looking and seeing books, mobiles, and feelable, shakeable, rollable, and pullable toys. The use of mirrors for gestural and language imitation games should be encouraged.

11. The use of role-playing to discuss and clarify classroom responsibilities such as:who does cognitive lessons and when; who fills out checklists of development or of practiced tasks; and how are contacts with parents at time of delivery or pick-up of the child handled. The fostering of good interpersonal staff relations such as sharing and switching tasks, feeding, and diapering should be emphasized.

12. The use of video-tapes and films, including material on child development and testing.

In another publication (Honig & Lally, 1971) these topics are amplified and elaborated and examples are given of ways to fit them into a training program.

In-service areas of training. In-service follow-through training is important in promoting quality-control and in upgrading skills. It cannot be assumed that skills gained in pre-service training sessions will be remembered without occasional review; nor can it be assumed that the caregiver will take it upon herself to keep abreast of innovations in the field.

Weekly in-service sessions should make use of case conferences on individual development difficulties, such as too little smiling, vocalizing, or reaching. Auxiliary personnel such as pediatricians or communications students may be brought

into such conferences. Emphasizing the developmental advances of a given infant at an individual case conference provides a positive and refreshing change in emphasis and outlook from time to time. Another aspect of case conferences should be encouragement of efforts with, for instance, infants who were not initially responsive to paraprofessional efforts. Released time for the paraprofessional to attend testing sessions and to observe other aspects of the research program should be another follow-through measure. Also of importance in assuring paraprofessional growth is making materials such as Blank's (1969), Forrester et al.'s (1971), Palmer's (1967), and Schaefer & Aaronson's (1966) available and in capsule form, so that concepts can be refreshed and new materials introduced.

Training Spinoffs for People and Programs

Some of the benefits one should expect to accrue from a successful paraprofessional program are sometimes overlooked but can be extremely important to community growth. A paraprofessional's use of skills, information, and materials dealing with the intellectual development of children will not be confined to work at the Center. Children in her family and in the families of friends will benefit from her training. It is to be hoped that, after training, paraprofessionals, because of their better understanding of behavior management and a more empathic view of the lives of children, will have an easier time in coping with the emotional development of their own children.

As a result of such training endeavors program directors will find that they have forwardly mobile people in their employ. With a minimum amount of encouragement, such as released time for community college work, and course credit from community colleges for training received at the Center, paraprofessionals will move on in their own learning careers.

The final benefit and perhaps the most potent part of the training of the paraprofessional is the realization that comes to the professionals that a two-way learning experience is taking place: professionals are training the paraprofessionals, and the paraprofessionals are training the professionals. As is perhaps true in all teaching endeavors, the teacher learns as much as the student.

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Footnotes

1. Author Lally's address: Syracuse University Children's Center, 100 Walnut Place, Syracuse, New York, 13210.